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AUTHOR	Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines various approaches to teaching reading. The first approach considered focuses on a teacher strictly following a textbook. The paper notes that textbooks which employ programmed reading help students progress at a slow but steady rate. It then discusses the hierarchical method of state mandated objectives and testing. Features of the state mandated approach are highlighted, such as the following: state tests are written by those removed from the classroom; the tests tend to measure lower levels of cognition such as recall and comprehension rather than critical and creative thinking; and they are only meaningful if teachers construct instruction based on the tests. The final method of teaching reading considered in the paper is an open ended approach, where teachers pick and choose from textbooks and allow the students some choices. Individualized reading and sustained silent reading are examples of this open ended approach. (PM)

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Pedagogical Considerations in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN READING

There are selected considerations which need to be made pertaining to reading pedagogy. Thus, reading instruction may be highly teacher centered and directed. Toward the other end of the continuum, the reading curriculum may be quite open ended to invite pupil consideration in terms of developing scope and sequence in reading instruction.

Teacher Directed Reading Pedagogy

A strong teacher directed reading pedagogy might well involve basal textbook use in which the manual is followed religiously. Here, the reading teacher follows the given objectives for pupils to achieve in the basal. The objectives may stress cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domain ends. The learning activities presented in the manual are also carefully followed. These tend to be varied such as having discussions covering content read, committee work in making an art project to reveal what has been learned from reading a given a selection, and dramatizing content from the basal. The recommended evaluation techniques in the manual are used to ascertain what pupils have achieved. These include multiple choice, essay, matching, true/false, and short answer.

A basal text may be phonics orientated in that the scope and sequence of learnings emphasize phonetic principles in moving from the easier to the more complex. Since phonics instruction does emphasize abstract learnings, more drill and practice will be stressed as compared to the previously mentioned use of basal readers. Phonics advocates believe that pupils should master grapheme/phoneme skills in order to read fluently and comprehend well. Phonics then is a prerequisite to reading and understanding subject matter read (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Nine).

When supervising university student teachers in the public schools in the 1970s, the author had a plethora of occasions to observe pupils engaged in programmed reading from a basal reader. The programmed reader move forward in very small steps so that pupils would basically be correct in each response made to a question. Thus, a pupil read a very short selection of three sentences, for example, on the third grade level. He/she would then respond to a question in the basal. Next, the pupil checked the personal response made with the answer provided by the programmer. If correct, the pupil felt rewarded. If the pupil was incorrect in the response made, he/she would then know the

correct response and also be ready for the next sequential reading. The same steps of learning in reading would be emphasized again and again with read, respond, and check. Pupils rarely responded incorrectly since programed reading stresses a carefully knit sequence with read, respond, and check. The program had been field tested since a 95% rate of success in responding was listed in the manual. Here, reading instruction becomes a science with objectivity involved in response grading. Pupils needed to follow the sequence as provided since each new item read was based on the previously read content.

Programmed reading then is much more prescriptive as compared to commonly used basals in the classroom.

Perhaps, the most hierarchical approach in reading instruction is state mandated objectives and testing. They are written and developed on the state level, such as the department of education. Curriculum, academic, and measurement specialists usually determine the objectives and items on the state mandated curriculum. Reading is the most frequently tested area of the curriculum for pupils to be tested in. With the revised 2002 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), pupils are to be tested annually, nation wide, on the third through the eighth grade levels. It has not been determined if a pupil fails a test on any of the above named grade levels, if he/she can then be promoted to the next sequential grade. Summer school, before and after school tutoring services might be available for those needing more instructional time due to failing a test. The most serious occurrence would be an exit test taken on the senior year of high school to determine if a student is to receive a high school diploma. These high stakes tests then are vital to pass, otherwise a student with no high school diploma, might be very handicapped in securing a job.

Unique features of state mandated tests are the following:

1. they are written by those removed in distance from the local classroom level of actual teaching.
2. they may not be valid unless the teacher follows carefully the state mandated objectives of instruction to align the local curriculum.
3. they may not have been pilot tested to take out weaknesses of and in test items.
4. they tend to measure the lower levels of cognition such as recall and comprehension. Critical and creative thinking are difficult to measure with the use of multiple choice test items.
5. they do not reflect what pupils have learned on a day to day basis (See Ediger, 1995, Chapter Five).

Every person needs a high school diploma as a minimum to obtain quality employment. In a time of higher standards in the world of work, the student ideally should have, as a minimum, a baccalaureate degree or specific vocational training beyond secondary school in a needed area in society. To look backward in time, for a moment, in 1940, about 50% of eighteen year olds were graduating from high school nationally. It might have been considered somewhat unique for being a high school graduate in 1940. Now, higher standards exist for being employed in society. Upgrading skills, even though one might possess a baccalaureate or master's degree, is a necessity. There are a plethora of changes which occur each year in society. For example, as soon as a computer has been purchased, the company which manufactured it, calls to ask if updating this device is wanted.

John Dewey (1859- 1952) stated that if anything was true in society, it was the item of change. This is why he stressed the importance of problem solving as a major method of learning. Thus, with change, new problems arise which need to be solved (Dewey, 1916).

Good And Teller (1973) wrote the following:

Dewey held that we think when we must, and that thinking originates in a perplexity, an obstacle, or a doubt... If thinking is defined as the effort to find an answer to a problem or to resolve a perplexity, then, naturally, it cannot occur except in the presence of some difficulty. Like other truisms, however, this one is worth stating. It says that situations can be set up to stimulate thinking.

Open Ended Programs of Reading Instruction

Basal readers may also be used in teaching and learning with an open ended focus. Here, the teacher uses the manual for the basal in a flexible manner. The teacher may choose some of his/her own objectives as well as lean upon the manual for others. In fact, the entire manual is viewed as suggestions in developing a quality reading program. The teacher may bring in many of his/her own learning activities so that pupils may achieve the objectives of instruction. The reading teacher then may bring in, among others, an excursion, making dioramas, and journal writing as related activities for pupil objectives attainment. The evaluation techniques may include multiple intelligences theory whereby a pupil may select the approach to be used in assessment of progress such as artistic intelligence (See Gardner, 1993). Here, the pupil may develop an art project to

indicate what has been comprehended from an ongoing reading lesson or unit of instruction.

Individualized reading further becomes a more open ended procedure of teaching and learning. Here, a wide variety of library books on diverse genera need to be available for pupil choice. The learner may then select which library book to read. The chosen book might well reflect the personal interests of the learner. The pupil then reads the library book and has a followup conference with the teacher. Oral reading skills and comprehension are evaluated in the conference. Oral reading is emphasized since it involves observable behavior. The pupil may choose which selection to read aloud to the teacher. There are a plethora of opportunities for pupils to make decisions within the individualized reading framework.

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is another plan of informal reading whereby pupils choose a library book to read during a designated time in the school day whereby everyone reads in the classroom, at the same time. Pupils here are to see models of individuals enjoying and participating in silent reading. There is no formal or informal evaluation of reading progress. Sheer interest and quality attitudes are emphasized in SSR. Eisner (2002) wrote the following:

The kind of schools we need would help students gradually assume increased responsibility for framing their own goals and learning how to achieve them. We want students eventually to become architects of their own education. The long term aim of teaching is to make itself unnecessary.

Saying the long term aim of teaching is to make itself unnecessary is simply to make explicit what I hope readers have gleaned from arguments here. Helping students learn how to formulate their own goals is a way to enable them to secure their freedom. Helping them to learn how to plan and execute their lives in relation to these goals is a way of developing their autonomy. Plato once defined a slave as someone who executes the purposes of another. Over the grade levels , we have conceived of teaching as setting problems that student solve. Only rarely have we created the conditions through which students set the problems that they wish to pursue, Yet this is precisely what they will need to be able to do once they leave the protected sphere of the school.

Thus, the pupil increasingly is to set goals and work toward their achievement, according to Eisner. There is much wisdom in contemplating the curriculum in terms of developing pupil independence in a gradual manner or as soon as a learner can

work independently. Why? Life seems to favor this approach. Thus, the young person is able to do more things sequentially in the maturation process. Then too, parents increasingly age and ultimately die. Most young people desire to be independent and not have to depend upon others. It is more convenient to do so. Depending upon others can make for a lack of responsibility on the part of the significant other. Then too, the assistance from others may not be available due to ill health, unemployment, old age, self destruction tendencies such as alcohol and drug abuse, among other reasons. There is self pride, too, in depending upon the self.

Decision making in life is highly important due to all the choices which need to be made such as a future vocation, a marriage partner, friends, religious affiliation, clubs and organizations to join, as well as home and car to buy. Bad choices are continually made such as losing much money due to gambling, drinking, and self destructive choices. Being able to choose well is an art. Choices need to be made, from among alternatives. John Locke (1632- 1704) wrote the following:

A sound mind in a sound body, is a short, but full description of a happy state in this world; he that hath these two, has little more to wish for; and he that wants either of them, will be but little better for anything better or anything else. Men's happiness or misery, is for the most part of their own making. He whose mind directs not wisely, will never take the right way... I confess there are some men's constitutions of body and mind so vigorous, and well formed by nature, that they need not much assistance from others; but by the strength of their natural genius, they are, from their cradles, carriers towards what is excellent; and by the privilege of their happy constitutions, are abel to do wonders. But examples of this kind are but few; and I think I may say, that the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind. The little, or most insensible, impressions on our tender infancies, have very important and lasting consequences...

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Truman State University
201 W. 22nd, Box 417
North Newton, KS. 67117

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